

Chiari Didn't Stop This Lacrosse Player

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Bryant among Babson's best

By Marc_Meyers

For Arrowsic's Libby Bryant, playing women's lacrosse is all about being part of a team.

Babson College is pleased she chose its team.

The senior Bryant is among the Babson career scoring leaders and is leading the Beavers in their hunt for a New England Women's and Men's Athletic Conference tournament bid.

Bryant first picked up lacrosse as a member of the Bath Middle School program and was enthralled by the quickness of the game.

"I enjoyed the fast pace and I really enjoyed being on a team," she said. "I think I just really enjoyed playing lacrosse."

Bryant also played field hockey and basketball at Morse, but excelled at lacrosse where she was an All-Kennebec Valley Athletic Conference First-Team choice as a junior and Second-Team selection as a senior. She knew she wanted to continue with lacrosse in college.

Bryant found that Babson fit both of her requirements of a strong business program - she'll receive her degree in May and is looking toward law school - and a lacrosse program.

When Bryant arrived at Babson, she was greeted by a new coach, Kully Hagerman. Bryant has been thrilled to play for the same coach for all four years.

"I very much enjoyed it," she said. "I had the privilege of getting a new coach my freshman year."

The experience has been likewise for Hagerman.

"Having Libby through all (four years) has been sort of comforting," said Hagerman. "Obviously I didn't recruit Libby, but I feel as though she's one of my own."

In Bryant's freshman year, the Beavers went 8-9 and tied for second place in the NEWMAC, reaching the conference semifinals.

Between her freshman and sophomore years, Bryant was diagnosed with a genetic disorder called Chiari Malformation, which causes pressure on the brain through excess growth. She had decompressive surgery during the summer of 2002.

Brain surgery would appear to entail a long recovery process, but Bryant "made a point to" not miss any school time. There were some post-surgery issues that accompanied her surgery, such as a loss of coordination and mobility, which made it impossible for Bryant to play fall lacrosse.

"It was very difficult," she said.

Bryant knew she needed something to occupy her time and Hagerman set her up with a position coaching a youth lacrosse team in Roxbury, Mass. She believes the experience was as beneficial to her as it more than likely was to her players.

"I think it helped my game," said Bryant, who also coached a Maine Select team last summer. "I was lucky to have the opportunity to coach while I was playing. It helped me with playing with my teammates."

Hagerman thought the position suited Bryant perfectly.

"She definitely has a love for lacrosse, which is something coaches have to have," said Hagerman. "She relates really well to kids and she makes it fun."

Bryant returned to play in the spring of her sophomore year, but only in a limited role.

"I did make sure through my doctor that it was OK to play," she said. "I didn't want to just baby it. My coordination was a bit off. I didn't have full mobility in my neck."

Although Bryant's sophomore season wasn't the best of times as she dealt with muscular problems that still linger today, it did supply her

most memorable collegiate lacrosse moment.

The Beavers were taking on NEWMAC rival Wheaton and fell behind 8-0 at halftime. Babson persisted and came from behind for an 11-10 victory with Bryant providing two goals in the win.

"It was the greatest showing in sports that I have ever been a part of," said Bryant, whose team was 6-8 her sophomore year. "I still kind of go back to that game anytime we're down."

Full strength

Bryant returned in full strength as a junior with 43 goals and 26 assists. The Beavers finished 10-8 and reached the NEWMAC semifinals. They were chosen for the ECAC tournament and made it to the semifinals, but lost to Eastern Connecticut 12-9.

Last summer, Bryant remained involved with sports ... not playing, but promoting. She worked for Fenway Sports Group doing promotional photography for fans watching the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park.

It turned out to be a pretty nice gig for Bryant. She was in the crowd "working" during the playoffs and the World Series and toured with the World Series trophy throughout Maine.

"The best one was Game 4 of the Yankees series up on the Green Monster," she said.

Which brings us to Bryant's senior year. Babson endured a tough start with a spring break trip that featured top-tier teams including Bowdoin, which is fifth in the national poll. The Beavers are now 3-6 and entering the NEWMAC schedule.

"We're looking pretty good," said Bryant. "We have a lot of potential this year. We've been playing all nationally-ranked teams to make ourselves better."

Bryant was named co-captain of the Beavers along with senior Alexa Rad. Hagerman said Bryant relishes the role of keeping the team together while organizing team meetings and dinners.

"She's stepped into the captain's role very naturally," said Hagerman. "She has what it takes to be a leader."

Hagerman added, "It used to be that girls would come here to get a great education and maybe play lacrosse. Now, we have girls coming here to play lacrosse and get a great education. She - along with the other co-captain - has changed the philosophy of the women's lacrosse team. It's almost like a sisterhood."

Bryant is going to end up with fairly impressive scoring statistics in her Babson career. Nine games deep into this season with 16 goals and 10 assists, she's moved to eighth place on the school's all-time career points list with 131 and is ranked in the top 10 in both goals (89) and assists (42).

"She uses all of her ability, all of the time," said Hagerman. "She's probably one of the hardest workers I have ever coached. She never gives up. She may score a lot, but she's really the assist girl ... making her teammates better."

The numbers are nice said Bryant, but it's not what she'll retain from her four years.

"I think it's a really good experience to play a sport (in college)," she said. "Just being part of a team and being selfless. Being a business student, I think there's plenty of things I'm going to use when I get out of school. I think there's a lot of good life lessons in playing a sport."

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